

## ART. III.—THE CLERGY FOR THEIR OFFICE.

WHERE is the parson? The question is not so superfluous as it may at first sight appear. Theoretically his whereabouts is pretty definitely fixed. He is to be found either in his parish church, engaged in the performance of the high ministries of his office, or he is passing from house to house through his parish visiting the whole and the sick, carrying the influence of pure religion wherever he goes, or he is in his study engaged in meditation and the prayerful preparation of his sermons. These three departments of activity severally connected with the church, the parish, the study, make up his ideal day, with the exception of such intervals as may allowably be conceded to his family, his friends, and his own refreshment and recreation. The somewhat exacting requirements of George Herbert himself might be in these circumstances fairly satisfied.

This, however, is unfortunately in the largely preponderant proportion of cases nothing more than an unrealized ideal. A clergyman is ordained to perform certain acts which are peculiar to his vocation, and which cannot be performed without such ordination. Practically, his time is in thousands of instances mainly occupied in performing such acts as are only indirectly associated with the clerical office, and which laymen might better carry out than himself.

The problem, How is the Church to touch the masses? presses for solution. One recognised help towards a solution is undoubtedly lay-co-operation. But there is one field of lay-co-operation hardly yet occupied, and the object of the present paper is to urge the desirability of such occupation without delay. Would not the clergy welcome it as the greatest possible boon, if it were utilized to set them free from the ever increasing and bewildering mass of secular and semi-secular toil which is daily drawing them off from the sacred work to which they have been called? How can the Church deal with the masses as they ought to be dealt with while the agents who should be in the van in the crusade against vice and ignorance find one half of their days filled with the desk-work of a City clerk? The English clergy are not, indeed, quite in the position of those of Jersey, who are ex-officio members of the 'States,' and may be seen inspecting road-makings, taking harbour-soundings, presiding at committee-dinners, or entangled in litigation in that hyperlitigious community. But there is a deplorable disparity between the ministerial opportunities and the actual ministerial labours of only too many urban incumbents amongst us; and the mental friction occasioned by the recognition of this disparity will be proportioned to the

sense of pastoral responsibility. The pastor who tries to live for his people will be weighted distressfully with the thought of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, who seldom or never come in contact with him, while he is immersed in his day-school accounts, or organizing some one of the dozen parish-charities of which he is secretary and treasurer and sole correspondent.

Our contention is not that the beneficed clergy have too much to do; but that too much presents itself to be done by them, which they cannot even attempt to do. The main objects for which their order exists have day after day through a large portion of the year to yield to others connected with pursuits not essentially allied to the Christian priesthood. A typical case may be cited. Through the hands of the Vicar of a parish of eight thousand souls, situated in a midland manufacturing centre, £3,000 a year passes, for the expenditure of every shilling of which he has to account in print. Thousands of circulars and notes issue from the Vicarage annually, the inditing or folding and addressing of which have to be done by himself and his curate and family. He has an abundant supply of lay-agency for distinctly religious work; but one only amongst the number of his Church-workers assists in the salvation of his time from being frittered in the pettinesses of ignoble detail. It will not surprise to hear that he visits twenty or thirty cases a week, where he might, and gladly would, visit sixty or eighty; and the supreme work of addressing himself to the deeps of his holy office has too often to be hustled into a hurried hour or so instead of engaging the major part of his day.

Enviably exceptions might, we are ready to allow, be quoted. One such we know, where everything of the nature of secretarial employment is undertaken by laymen. But this is in a parish largely inhabited by people of leisure.

It is certainly far from desirable that the clergy should hold themselves aloof from all but strictly ministerial labours. "*Humani nihil a me alienum puto*" is becoming more and more fully recognised to-day as a working motto for the Church, whose mission is intended to touch life at all points. To the Christian life has no secular side, even as to the worldling it has no sacred. And to abandon to hopeless secularity the major part of the earthly course of ordinary men and women is to accept the false assumption that religion is an occupation rather than a principle, and so comes into competition with, instead of assisting to fulfil the duties of, "the daily round, the common task." Granting that the commonplaces of life admit of consecration, the clergy must have something to say about them, something by way of practical dealing to do with them.

Our contention is not that they should decline to touch any but strictly ministerial work, but that it should be rendered possible for them to assign a more adequate portion of their time to that ministerial work by their being relieved of the pettinesses of mere detail to a greater degree than they now are.

The pastoral office stands alone among callings in respect of the indefiniteness of its requirements. It will surely be conceded on all hands that that which a clergyman is alone competent to do ought to engage him, his time, his thought, more than anything else. That he should be compelled by the pressure of circumstance daily to do what others could do, and probably more efficiently than he, appears to be an element of weakness in the Church's discipline and organization.

Another peculiarity marks the clerical lot. In all other careers, the drudgery of detail is mainly confined to the earlier stages. With the responsibilities of position there comes exemption from the more mechanical duties incident to an apprenticeship. The reverse is oftener than not the case with the most spiritual of all employments. A curate's time is often more worthily distributed than an incumbent's. The ever-growing mass of accounts and correspondence has not yet become a weariness to his younger flesh, a still more wearing weariness to his more buoyant spirit. His precious visiting hours are not broken in upon two or three out of the six days of the week by imperious calls summoning him in other directions. If "A's" son seeks admission to an asylum, "B's" daughter wants pupils, it is, of course, always the incumbent who is to cater for the votes or write to his friends. And the frittering of time in such matters becomes more and more serious, the better known, and therefore, presumably, the more efficient the beneficed clergyman becomes, until he hopelessly degenerates into an instrument ("agent" is too good a word) but little removed from a parochial automaton, well furnished through long habit to scratch off his twenty or thirty letters a day, and four times a week talk twaddle for exactly fifteen minutes, which the indulgence of his flock is willing to accept in lieu of a sermon.

We all know that there are notable exceptions; that men specially endowed are to be met with, on whose broad shoulders all this burden of detail sits lightly—pastoral and episcopal Wilberforces who can preach sermons the hearers will never forget, at the close of a week of herculean grappling with multifarious work; ministerial Broughams who can give their fourteen hours a day, and go to rest without a headache. But our plea is not for mercy for the giants, who need none, but for the rank and file of ordinary men; and not for their sakes only or chiefly, but in behalf of the Church whose servants they are,

and whose influence for good in the land depends so largely upon the way in which they husband their opportunities.

The question, How to meet the difficulty, and free the clergy for the great work of the priesthood, is eighteen centuries old. The Apostles summarily disposed of it. Finding themselves burdened with the cares of the daily doles of the poor, they created the diaconate—originally, be it remembered, an order called into existence for purely lay purposes. Is it out of the question that a corresponding solution of the difficulty before us should be found in the formation of an organization, co-extensive with the Church, for providing lay-brothers to be associated with all clergy who have above a certain population in their charge, who might relieve them of much of this weight of detail? The laity are stepping to the front at the present time, as never before, and with an alacrity that must gladden the hearts of the clergy. Are we, however, sure that quite the best and wisest kind of work is being assigned them? Is not their evangelistic work too often defaced by the crudities of unseasoned ardour? Are not Sunday-school teachers chosen without the slightest reference to their teaching capabilities, oftener than not with next to no guarantee of their personal knowledge of the dogmas of the faith? In any case, the laity are admitted at once to fellowship in spiritual work. That which should be the climax and culmination of an arduous novitiate is leapt into at a bound, while the priests and deacons are kept all their lives at work which robs them of half the legitimate scope for the exercise of their functional powers.

The ministers of other religious bodies that might be named decline to be thus hampered in the discharge of ministerial duty. In the Presbyterian Church of Scotland "serving tables" is entirely taken out of the hands of the presbyter: all collections, both for religious and philanthropic objects, are made by elders, or other agents, who form the kirk session, committees, or sub-committees. Treasurers and secretaries are elected by them, and the entire management of the funds entrusted to them.

Such a system would doubtless need safe-guarding to render it acceptable to the English clergy. In many cases, the position of the minister suffers by the transfer of business to other hands. But that its advantages have been recognised by the clergy who are in the best situation for judging is evidenced by the fact that the Episcopal Church of Scotland has largely adopted it. The vestries have real power; they manage all the church finances; they are responsible for collecting the funds necessary for the sustentation of all church work.

The benefit is not confined to the clergy. The laity feel that the welfare of the Church is no mere clerical matter.

They recognise that it depends upon them to maintain its ministrations and its works of charity with efficiency; that while it rests with their Rector to originate, organize, promote, and infuse with the true spirit, it devolves upon them to keep the machine in working order.

Will the writer be forgiven if he puts in a plea for individuality? All treatises on the pastoral office, all instructions to ordination candidates, make much of personal influence. Too much, we are inclined to think, cannot well be made of it. The effects of a ministry stamped with a strong personality are nearly certain to be lasting. Now, if we run all our clergy into one mechanical groove, we render the due development of personality an impossibility. Water that might flow in a natural channel, stagnates to a puddle in a rut. And it is becoming a question of moment whether, with all our parochial ramifications of work, we are not deepening the ruts instead of clearing the channels. The freest possible expansion of individuality, compatible with corporate unity and collective activity, appears to be desirable. But as long as we persist in cramping the independent personality of our clergy with the fetters of hyper-organization, we must be content with universal clerical mediocrity.

In his racy chapter on "Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well-being" John Stuart Mill has the following: "Customs are made for customary characters. . . . The same strong susceptibilities which make the personal impulses vivid and powerful, are also the source from whence are generated the most passionate love of virtue, and the sternest self-control. It is through the cultivation of these that society both does its duty and protects its interests. A person whose desires and impulses are his own—are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified by his own culture—is said to have a character. One whose desires and impulses are not his own has no character, no more than a steam-engine has a character. Whoever thinks that individuality of desires and impulses should not be encouraged to unfold itself, must maintain that society has no need of strong natures—is not the better for containing many persons who have much energy—and that a high general average of energy is not desirable. . . . Already energetic characters on any large scale are becoming merely traditional. The greatness of England is now all collective; individually small, we only appear capable of anything great by our habit of combining; and with this our moral and religious philanthropists are perfectly contented. But it was men of another stamp than this that made England what it has been; and men of another stamp will be needed to prevent its decline."

In the formation, the unfolding, the correction of national character, the Church has, or ought to have, no mean share. "He who would understand the English," said Carlyle, "must understand their Church." And our plea in this paper is *leisure for influence* for her clergy—leisure from the lower and dispensable in work in order to secure freedom, time, and scope for the higher and the indispensable. Transfer that which is transferable, that the untransferable may no longer be dwarfed to the dimensions of a *πάρεργον*—a mere subsidiary by-work, taken up in chance interstices of the clerical day. In order that influence—than which hardly anything can be mentioned more subtle and delicate, and in its constituents more complex—may be really telling and penetrating, we repeat that leisure is needed. The fussy, preoccupied man is not the man to draw to himself the confidences of his flock. Nobody likes to feel himself reduced to a decimal fraction.

And it is here that the Church of England encounters on such unequal terms the agents of the Church of Rome. Her priests are never in a hurry. Their very gait as they tread the streets suggests that they have limitless time at their disposal, and, if you will please to avail yourself of it, at *yours*. If you would seek their guidance, they will not be found catching the next post with pressing letters. They will not tell you, when you call, that they can give you just ten minutes, before the Society meeting in the neighbouring assembly rooms calls them away. They will instil the persuasion that nothing in the wide world is more engrossing than the particular matter touching which you seek their counsel. Do they, in this, as in divers other respects, or do they not, show us a more excellent way?

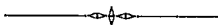
Our present protest gathers force from another reflection, and with this it closes. The Church, and if possible the world outside the Church even more so, calls for a learned clergy. By this is not meant a pedantic clergy. But the men who will be able to attract and retain the thinkers in their congregations must themselves be thinkers. Shallow verbiage may draw for a time, but will sooner or later cease to feed. "Will you be diligent in studies?" is a question put by the Bishop to the candidate for the priesthood. How many thousands, re-reading the Ordination-service in after-years, reach this question with a sigh? Students they have long ceased to be. There was a time when learning was a monopoly of the Church. A learned layman was indeed a *rara avis in terris*. The danger to-day is that knowledge, while embraced by the laity, should desert the clergy. Some wise words of the late Bishop Wilberforce may well be considered pertinent here. Thus he

addresses his ordination candidates (Address X.): "I would earnestly press upon you the duty of forming early in your ministry, and steadfastly maintaining throughout its course, real habits of theological study. You cannot with full efficiency perform the work God has set you to do without such habits. Even if your whole ministry is to be spent amongst a few unlettered people, you cannot 'make full proof' of it unless you are evermore a student. The mind which is not thus enriched will very soon become sterile. You will, unawares, be perpetually producing from it the same crop, and evermore with a feebler growth; you will become a mere self-repeater; your ministry will grind on, in a single groove, on a track of the dullest uniformity. Your people may be too unlettered to reason upon the causes of this barrenness in their teacher, but they will feel it; and its impression will most assuredly be marked in their feeble irretentive perception of the mighty truths which your drowsy monotone has made so dull and commonplace to them."

And if this be the effect of an unstudious ministry amongst the uncultured, its effect must be far more disastrous when the preacher's lot is cast amongst men of more active minds, trained to reason out religious and social questions for themselves.

These considerations appear to render a revision of the duties of the pastor's office, to say the least, desirable. That a certain amount of non-ministerial labour must devolve upon the parish priest is doubtless a necessity. That all has been done that might be done to minimize this, and set him freer for the calm, patient, and thorough discharge of his true functions, admits of question.

ALFRED PEARSON.



#### ART. IV.—WILLIAM COWPER.

ANOTHER biography of William Cowper has lately been added to those already in existence. The author of the new life is the Principal of Cowper School, Olney, and he has consequently had exceptional advantages in living on the spot associated with so many years of the poet's lifetime. Mr. Wright has, we believe, been engaged for some time on the work, and his intimate knowledge of the district has enabled him to throw fresh light on many interesting details in the poet's career. He has further consulted many and important documents unknown to previous biographers, and he claims to have discovered "a large number of new facts." He has certainly succeeded in producing a volume to which all lovers of the poet will turn with interest, although regarded simply on